

Myth 82: Confusing Names: The Naming of Gardnerville by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The late Sessions "Buck" Wheeler and William W. Bliss in their engaging book, *Tahoe Heritage, The Bliss Family of Glenbrook, Nevada* (1992), tell us that the town of Gardnerville in Carson Valley was named for Mathew Culbertson Gardner. It is not true.

A common mistake is to credit a person with the legacy of another who has the same last name, and sometimes first and last names. Witness all the confusion over the good work of Carson City horticulturalist George Washington Gale Ferris, Sr.; structural engineer and son George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., inventor of the Ferris Wheel; and Reno architect George Ashmead Ferris.



Some have confused Major Marcus Reno with General Jesse Lee Reno as the namesake for northern Nevada's largest community. Reno was named for the Civil War general who died in battle at South Mountain, Maryland, and not the major associated with the disastrous Battle of Little Big Horn in what is now Montana. There are more examples of this type of confusion in Nevada history including the namesake of Gardnerville.

No doubt, Matthew C. Gardner was a prominent Nevadan. According to his obituary in the *Carson City News* (June 3, 1908), the Arkansas native found his way to Carson City via California in 1861. Gardner's ranch on the southern outskirts of the capital city was among the largest in Eagle Valley. "He was a central figure in the logging and lumber industry of the early days, and traces of his work can still be seen from Carson City over the mountains to Tallac," wrote the *News*. Gardner's pallbearers included two former governors and a supreme court justice.

However, Gardnerville is named for John and Mary Gardner, who sold a portion of their Carson Valley ranch to Leander S. Ezell on November 28, 1877 and to Lawrence Gilman on April 5, 1879, and not after M. C. Gardner. We know precious little of the Gardners except they were born in England--Mary's birth was in Manchester and John's in Preston--and they had been living in Douglas County since 1864 according to Mary's obituary in *Genoa's Weekly Courier* (July 14, 1899). "The death of Mrs. Gardner deserves more than passing notice, as she was the widow of John Gardner," the *Courier* proclaimed, "who gave the name to Gardnerville." Locals affectionately referred to the head of the household as "Uncle John" and he was elected the Douglas County Public Administrator in 1878 as a Republican. After selling the bulk of their ranch to Henry Vansickle on December 13, 1880 according to deed records, the Gardners bought a small property in Clear Creek Canyon. John died on December 5, 1887 and Mary on July 10, 1899. The couple is buried in the Jacks Valley cemetery.

Lawrence Gilman, after acquiring Vansickle's interest in the former Gardner property on April 26, 1881, began selling parcels. On January 19, 1882, the Valhalla Society purchased a lot adjacent to the County Road and built Valhalla Hall.

In the meantime, Gilman had moved the Kent House, situated between Genoa and Walley's Hot Springs, to his East Fork Township property. The structure was renamed the Gardnerville Hotel and the settlement included a blacksmith shop. On June 28, 1881, the Gardnerville post office opened with Gilman as the postmaster. Upon Gilman's death on July 2, 1905, the *Record Courier* in Gardnerville noted that "[h]e has long been considered among the founders of Gardnerville and justly so."

The moral to this story: Give credit where credit is due. Sometimes it's all in a name.

Photograph courtesy of Nevada State Museum.

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